

- [54] ELECTRICALLY-ERASABLE,
ELECTRICALLY-PROGRAMMABLE
READ-ONLY MEMORY CELL
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- [73] Assignee: Texas Instruments Incorporated,
Dallas, Tex.
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- [22] Filed: Mar. 15, 1990

Related U.S. Application Data

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doned.
- [51] Int. Cl.⁵ H01L 29/68; H01L 29/34;
G11C 11/34
- [52] U.S. Cl. 357/23.5; 357/54;
365/185
- [58] Field of Search 357/23.5; 365/185

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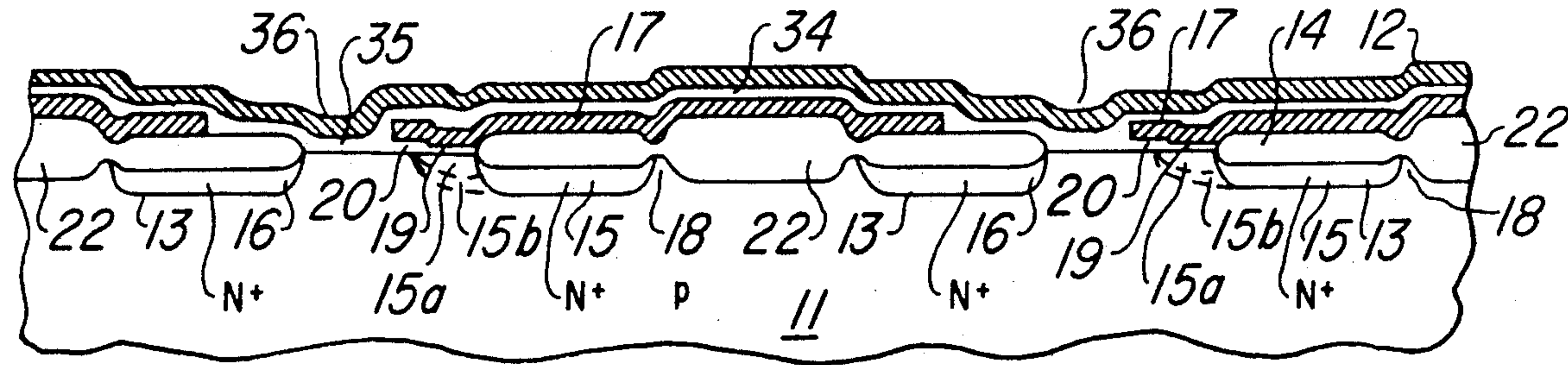
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Assistant Examiner—Robert P. Limanek
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[57] ABSTRACT

An electrically-erasable, programmable ROM cell, or an EEPROM cell, is constructed using an enhancement transistor merged with a floating-gate transistor, where the floating-gate transistor has a small tunnel window, in a contact-free cell layout, enhancing the ease of manufacture and reducing cell size. The bitlines and source/drain regions are buried beneath relatively thick silicon oxide, which allows a favorable ratio of control gate to floating gate capacitance. Programming and erasure are provided by the tunnel window area, which is located near or above the channel side of the source. The window has a thinner dielectric than the remainder of the floating gate, to allow Fowler-Nordheim tunneling. By using dedicated drain or ground lines, rather than a virtual-ground layout, and by using thick oxide for isolation between bitlines, the floating gate can extend onto adjacent bitlines and isolation area, resulting in a favorable coupling ratio. Isolation between cells in the wordline direction is by a self-aligned implanted region, in this embodiment.

14 Claims, 3 Drawing Sheets



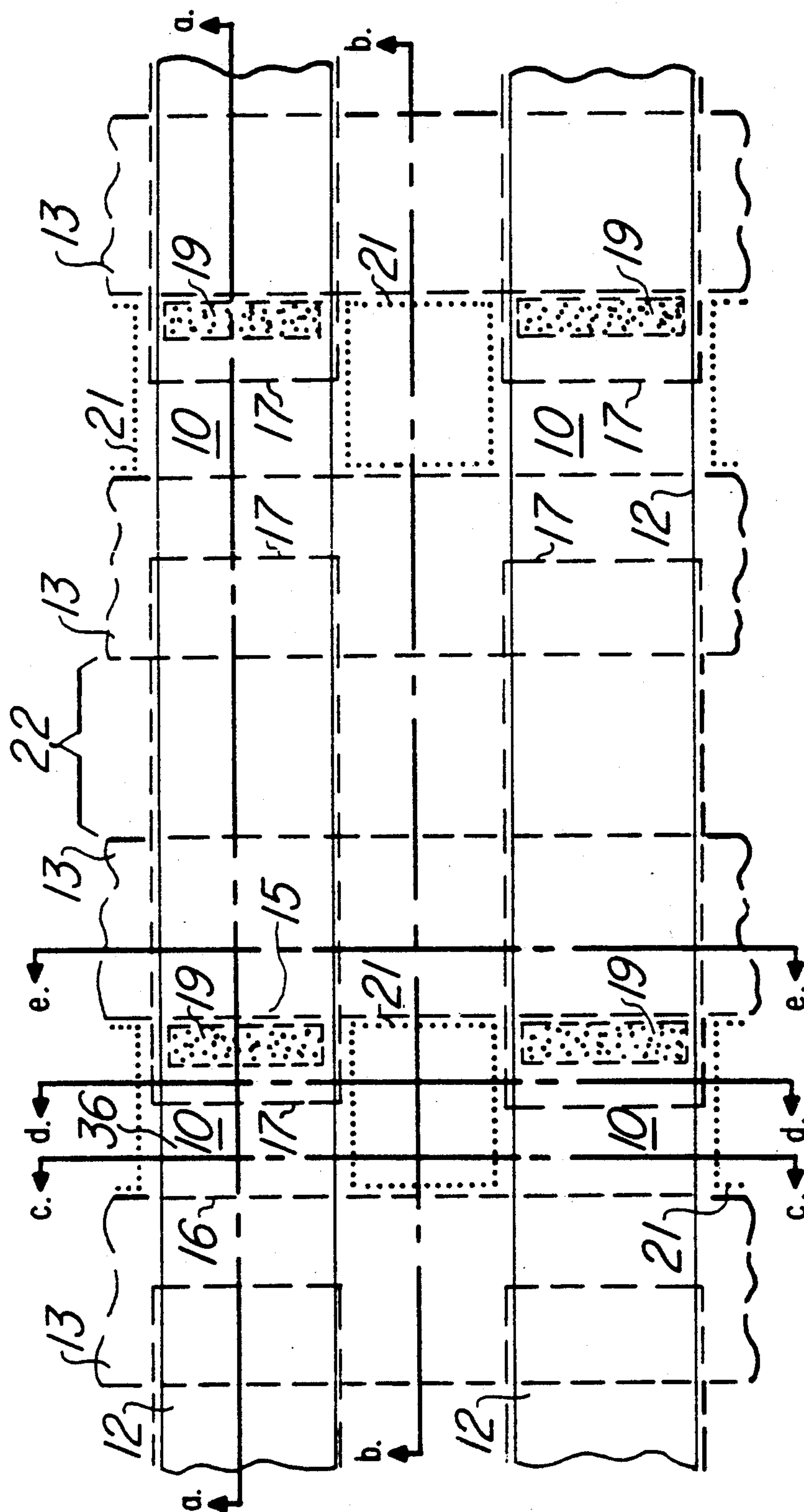


Fig. 1

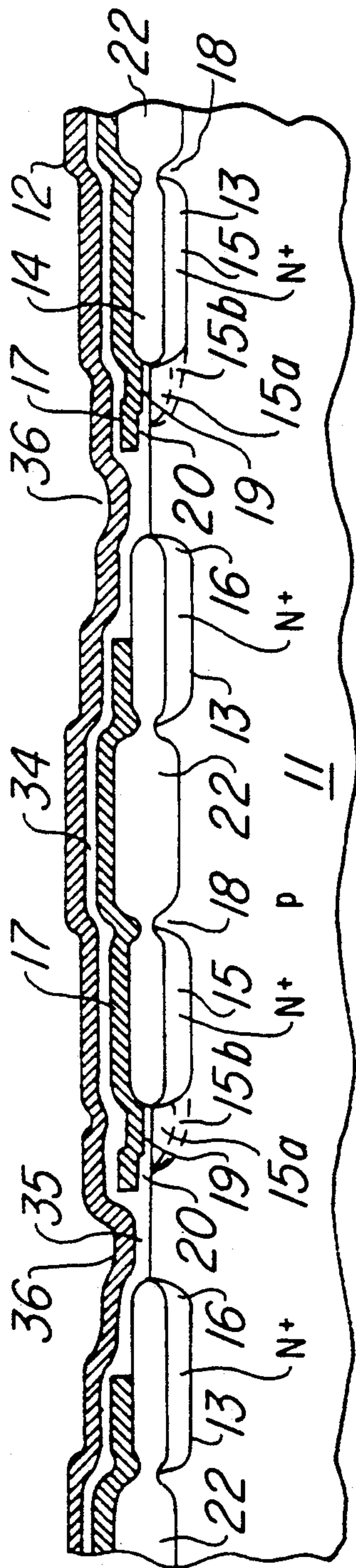


Fig. 2a

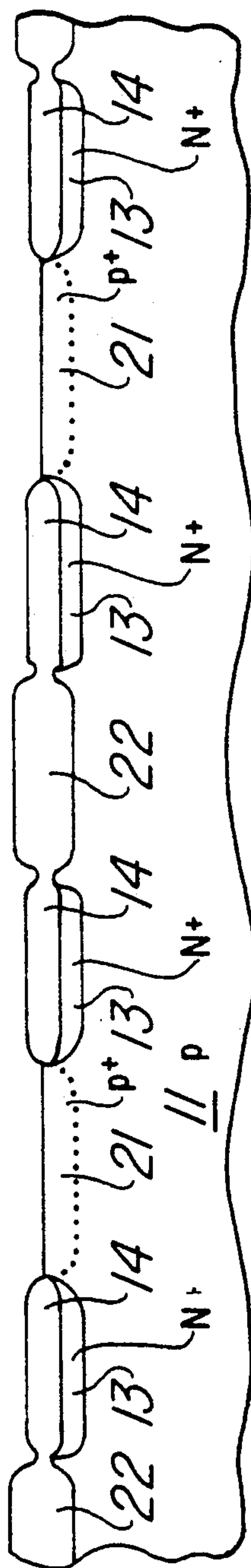


Fig. 2b

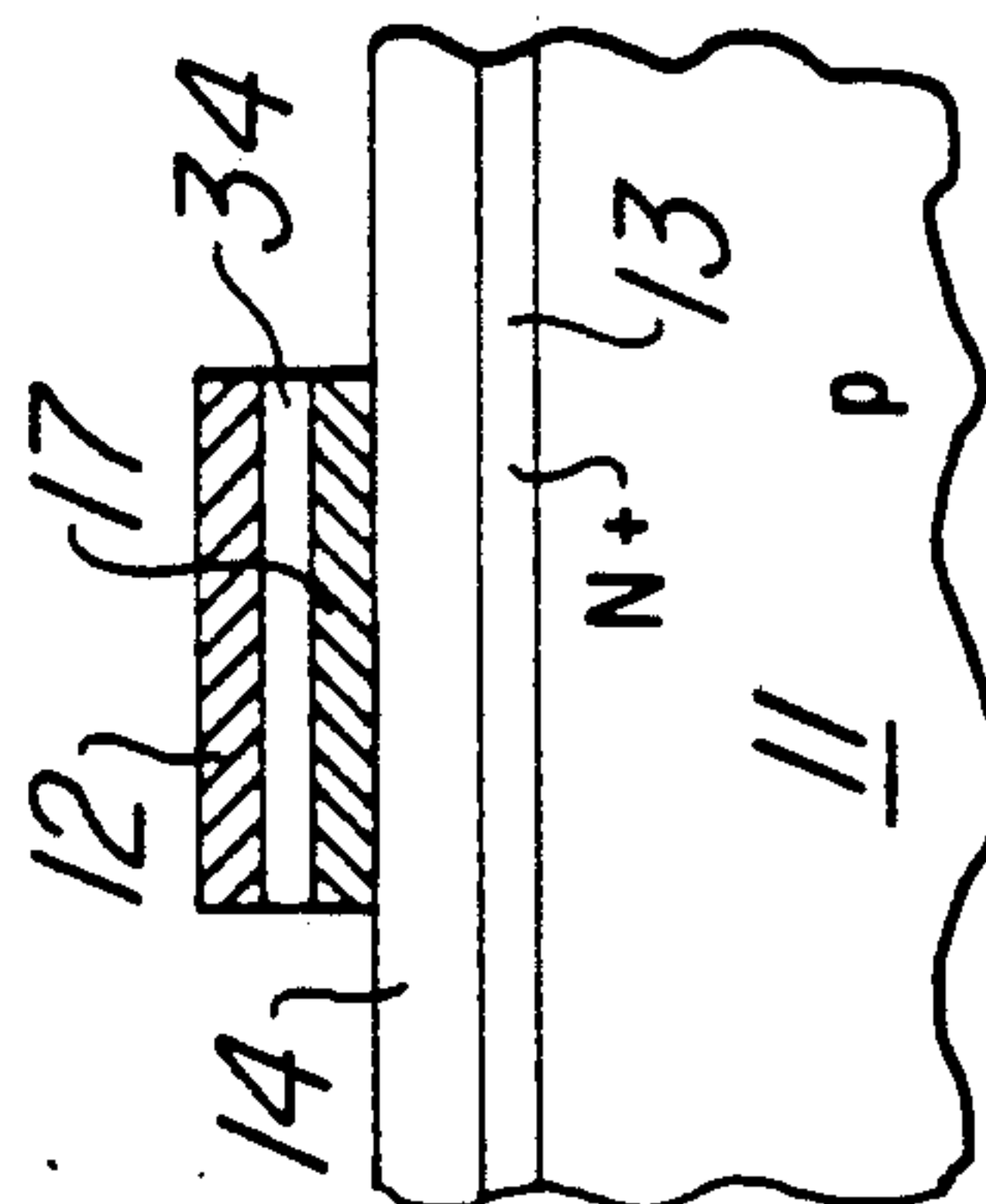


Fig. 2e

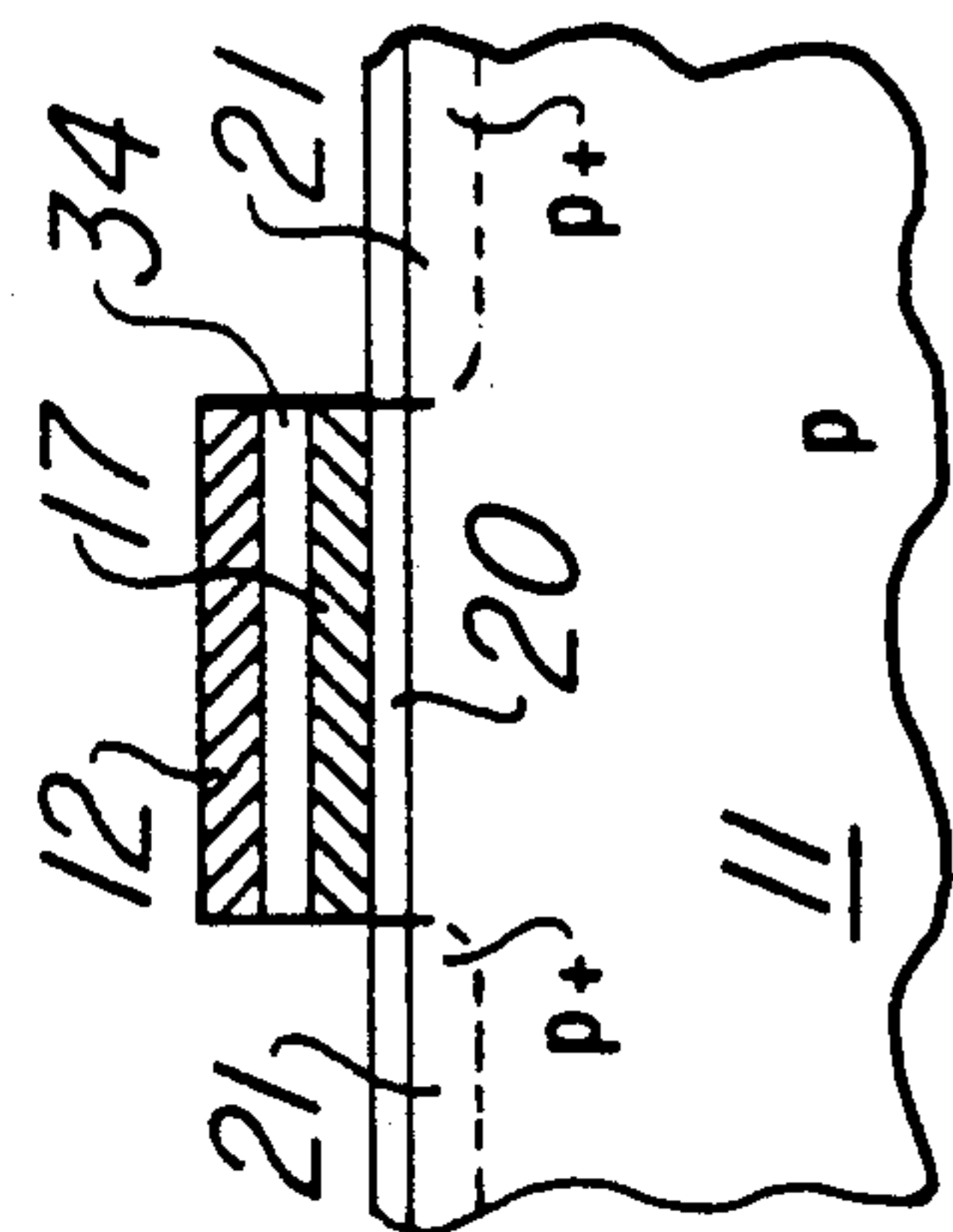


Fig. 2d

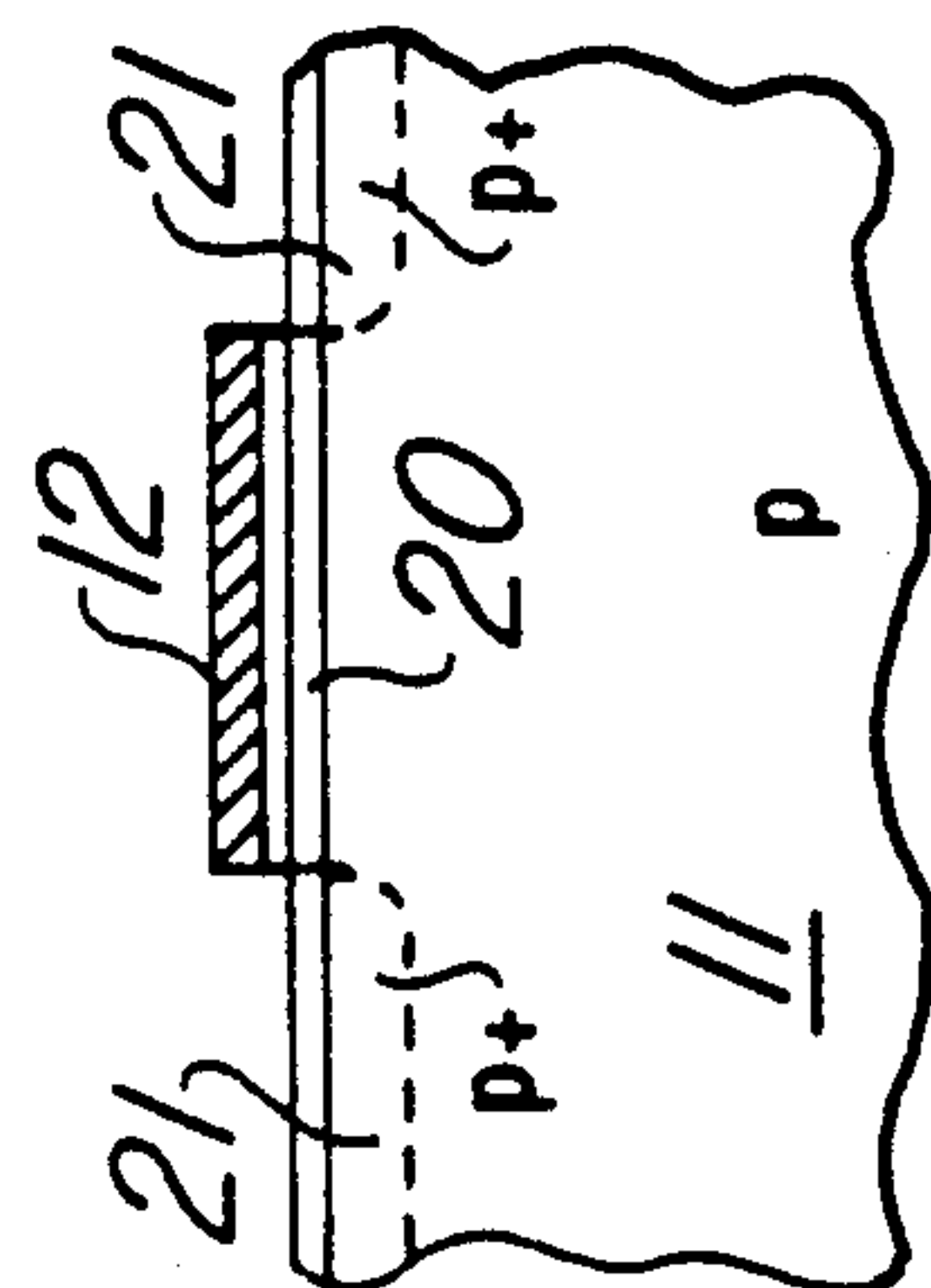


Fig. 2c

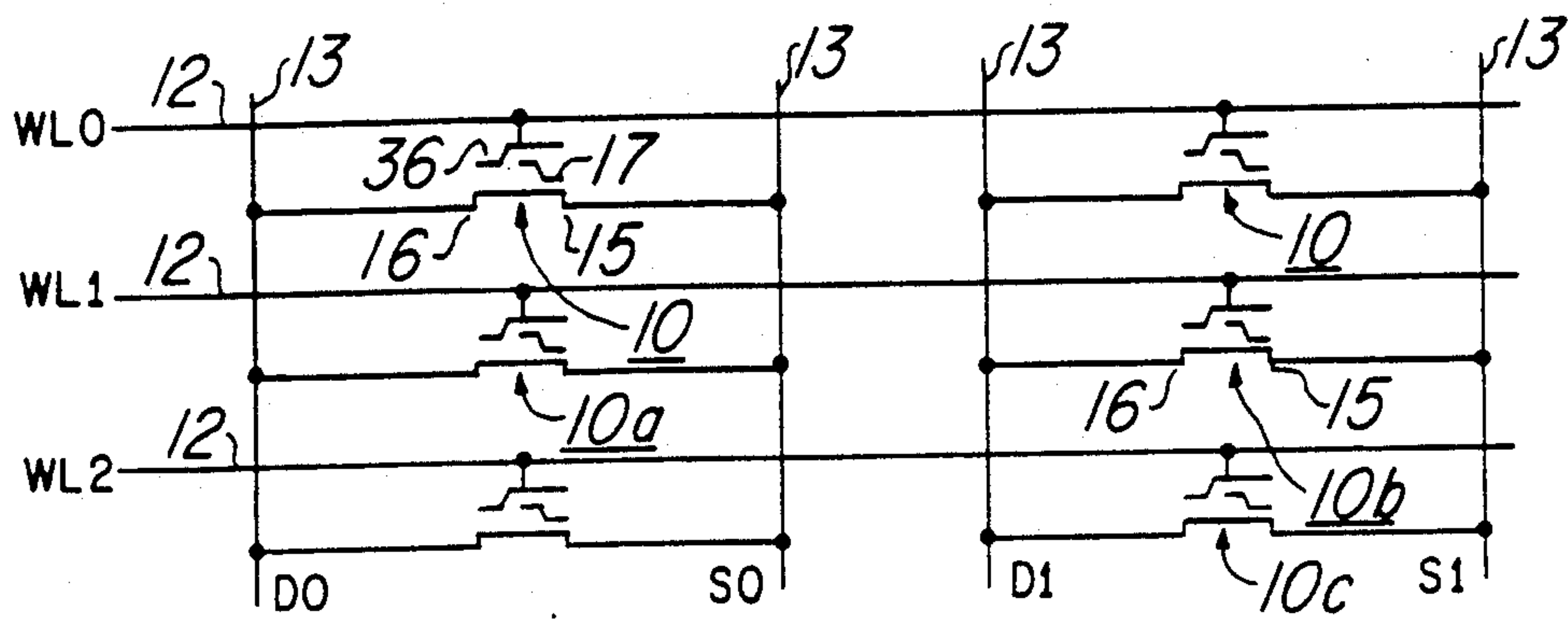


Fig. 3

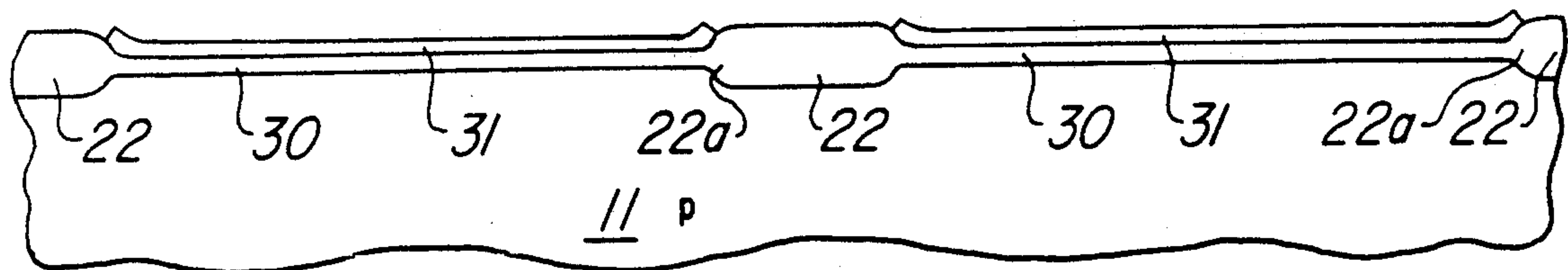


Fig. 4a

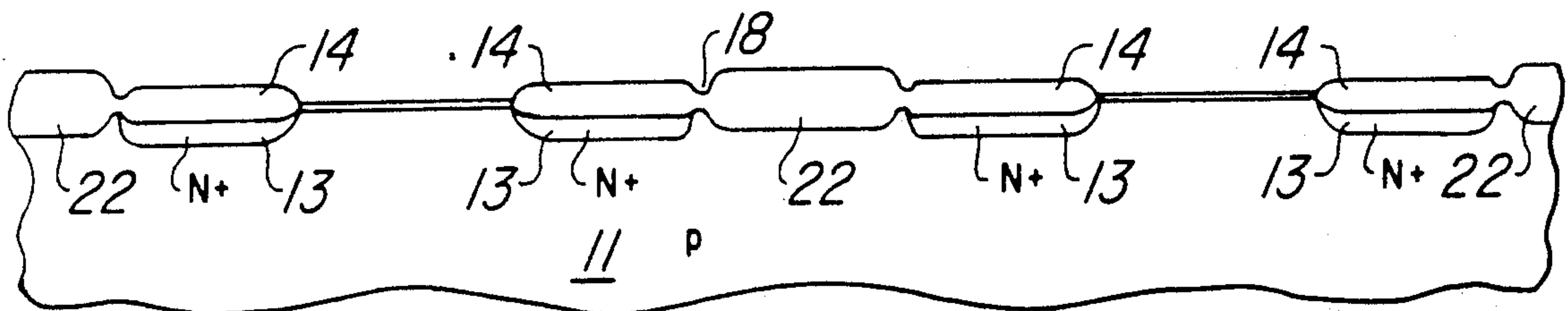


Fig. 4b

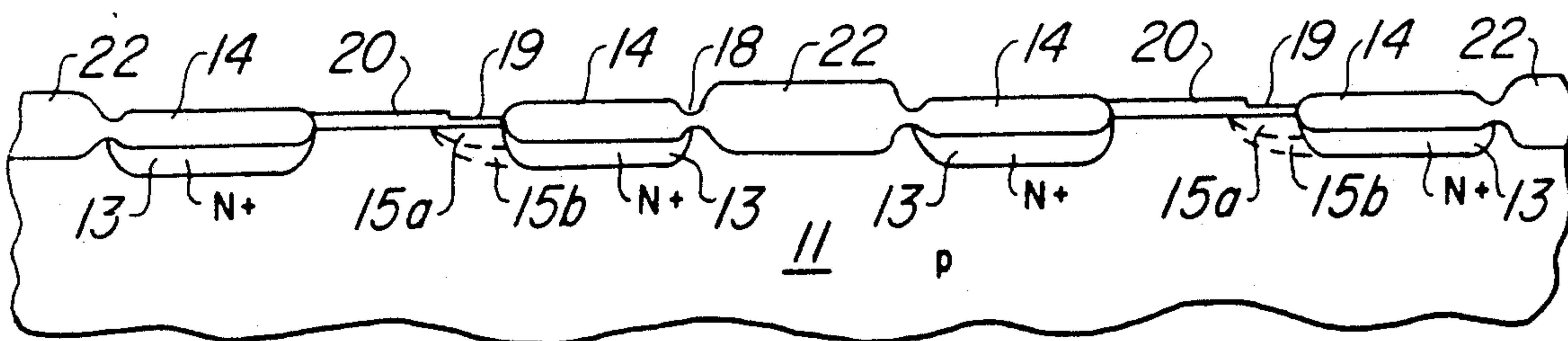


Fig. 4c

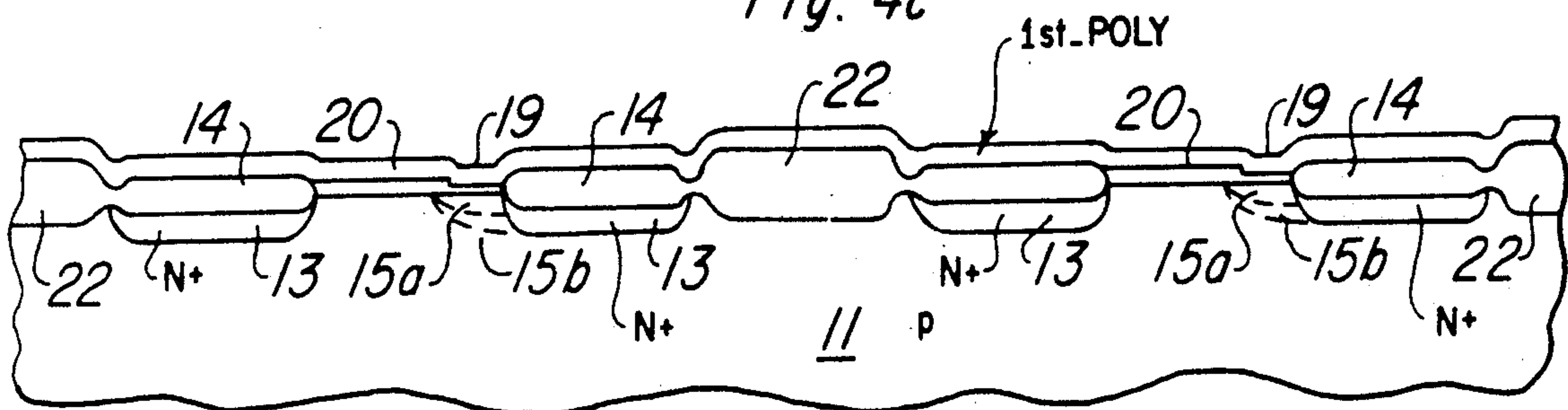


Fig. 4d

ELECTRICALLY-ERASABLE, ELECTRICALLY-PROGRAMMABLE READ-ONLY MEMORY CELL

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a continuation patent application of pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 07/219,528, filed July 15, 1988 now abandoned.

This application discloses subject matter also disclosed in co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 07/494,060, which is a continuation of pending U.S. patent application Ser. Nos. 07/219,530 filed and 7/494,042, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 219,529, filed July 15, 1989, filed herewith and assigned to Texas Instruments Incorporated. The foregoing applications are hereby incorporated herein by reference.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to semiconductor memory devices, and more particularly to an electrically-erasable, electrically-programmable ROM (read-only-memory) of the floating-gate type, and to a method for making such a device.

EPROMs, or electrically-programmable ROMs, are field-effect devices with a floating-gate structure. An EPROM floating gate is programmed by applying proper voltages to the source, drain and control gate of each cell, causing high current through the source-drain path and charging of the floating gate by hot electrons. The EPROM type of device is erased by ultraviolet light, which requires a device package having a quartz window above the semiconductor chip. Packages of this type are expensive in comparison with the plastic packages ordinarily used for other memory devices such as DRAMs (dynamic-random-access-memories). For this reason, EPROMs are generally more expensive than plastic-packaged devices. EPROM devices of this type, and methods of manufacture, are disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 3,984,822; 4,142,926; 4,258,466; 4,376,947; 4,326,331; 4,313,362; or 4,373,248; for example. Of particular interest to this invention is U.S. Pat. No. 4,750,024, issued June 7, 1988 and filed Feb. 18, 1986 by John F. Schreck and assigned to Texas Instruments Incorporated, where an EPROM is shown made by a method similar to that of U.S. Pat. No. 4,258,466; but with an offset floating gate.

EEPROMs, or electrically-erasable, electrically-programmable ROMs, have been manufactured by various processes, usually requiring a much larger cell size than standard EPROMs and requiring more complex manufacturing processes. EEPROMs can be mounted in opaque plastic packages that reduce the packaging cost. Nevertheless, EEPROMs have been more expensive on a per-bit basis, in comparison with EPROMs, due to larger cell size and to more complex manufacturing processes.

Flash EEPROMs have the advantage of smaller cell size in comparison with standard EEPROMs because the cells are not erased individually. Instead, the array of cells is erased in bulk.

Currently available flash EEPROMs require two power supplies, one for programming and erasing and another for reading. Typically, a 12-volt power supply is used for programming and erasing and a 5-volt power supply is used during read operations. It is desirable, however, to employ a single relatively low-voltage

supply for all of the programming, erasing and reading operations.

It is the object of this invention to provide an electrically programmable memory, or an electrically-erasable and electrically-programmable memory, that uses a single, relatively low-voltage, external supply for both programming and erasing, allowing the memory device to be compatible with on-board or in-circuit programming where systems have a single external power supply. It is also an object to provide a non-volatile memory that can be packaged in a less expensive opaque plastic package. An additional object is to provide an electrically-programmable memory that does not require high current for programming. A further object is to provide an improved method for making an EEPROM or a "flash" EEPROM, as well as an improved cell for an EEPROM or a "flash" EEPROM, the manufactured cell using P+ implanted regions for isolation between wordlines, using thick oxide for isolation of between bitlines, and providing improved coupling between the control gate and the floating gate during programming and erasing operations.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In accordance with one embodiment of the invention, an electrically-erasable PROM or EEPROM is constructed using an enhancement transistor merged with a floating-gate transistor. The floating-gate transistor has a small tunnel window adjacent the source in a contact-free cell layout, enhancing ease of manufacture and reducing cell size. The device has bitlines (source/drain regions) that are buried beneath relatively thick silicon oxide, allowing a favorable ratio of control gate to floating gate capacitance. Programming and erasing are accomplished using the tunnel window area near the source. The window has a thinner dielectric than the remainder of the floating gate to allow Fowler-Nordheim tunneling. By using dedicated drain and ground lines, rather than a virtual-ground layout, and by using thick oxide for isolation between the bitlines of adjacent cells, the floating gate can extend onto adjacent bitlines and isolation areas, resulting in a favorable coupling ratio. The isolation between adjacent wordlines can be by a P+ implanted region, similar to a channel-stop. Use of the P+ implanted region permits smaller cell size.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The novel features believed characteristic of the invention are set forth in the appended claims. The invention itself, however, as well as other objects and advantages thereof, will be best understood by reference to the following description of particular embodiments thereof, when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a plan view of small part of a semiconductor chip having memory cells according to one embodiment;

FIGS. 2a-2e are elevation views in section of the semiconductor device of FIG. 1, taken along the lines a-a, b-b, c-c, d-d, and e-e of FIG. 1;

FIG. 3 is an electrical schematic diagram of the cells of FIGS. 1 and 2a-2e; and

FIGS. 4a-4d are elevation views in section, corresponding to FIG. 2a, of the device of FIGS. 1 and 2a-2e at successive stages in the manufacture thereof.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

Referring now to FIGS. 1, 2a-2e, and 3, an array of electrically-erasable, electrically-programmable memory cells 10 is shown formed in a face of a silicon substrate 11. Only a very small part of the substrate is shown in the Figures, it being understood that these cells are part of an array of a very large number of cells. A number of wordlines/control gates 12 are formed by second-level polycrystalline silicon (polysilicon) strips extending along the face of the substrate 11, and bitlines 13 are formed beneath thick thermal silicon oxide layers 14 in the face. These buried bitlines 13 create the source region 15 and the drain region 16 for each of the cells 10. A floating gate 17 for each cell is formed by a first-level polysilicon layer extending across about half of a cell 10 and across one bitline and extending over onto another adjacent bitline 13. Two "horizontal" or X-direction edges of the floating gate 17 for a cell are aligned with the edges of a wordline/control gates 12. A tunnel area 19 for programming and erasing is formed near the source 15 of each cell 10, and silicon oxide at this window 19 is thinner, about 100 Å, compared to the dielectric coating 20 of about 350 Å for the remainder of the channel beneath the floating gate 17. Programming and erasing can be performed using a relatively low externally-applied voltage when the structure of the invention is employed, with Fowler-Nordheim tunnelling requiring very little current. The coupling between layer 12 and layer 17, compared to coupling between floating gate 17 and source 15 or substrate 11, is more favorable because the floating gate extends out across the bitlines 13 and isolating area 22. Therefore, a larger fraction of the programming/erasing voltages applied between control gate 12 and source 15 will appear between floating gate 17 and source 15. The cell 10 is referred to as "contact-free" in that no source-drain contact is needed in the vicinity of cell itself.

In contrast to the device of co-pending U.S. patent application Ser. No. 07/494,060 filed herewith, the regions between wordlines are implanted with P-type impurity to create doped isolation regions 21 that isolate cells from one another in the Y-direction. As in the device described in that application, strips 22 of LOCOS thick field oxide separate bitlines 13 between cells in the X-direction. Note that the array of cells is not of the "virtual-ground-circuit" type because there are two bitlines 13 or column lines (one for source, one for drain) for each cikymn (Y-direction) of cells, one bitline being a dedicated ground, and one being the data input/output and sense line.

The EEPROM cells of FIGS. 1, 2a-2e and 3 are programmed with a voltage V_{pp} applied to the selected wordline 12 of about +16 v to +18 v with respect to the source 15 of the selected cell 10. The source 15 of the selected cell 10 is at ground or other reference voltage. For example, in FIG. 3, if the cell 10a is selected to be programmed, then the wordline labelled WL1 is brought to + V_{pp} and the source labelled SO is grounded. The voltage + V_{pp} can be internally generated with charge pumps on the chip, with the externally-applied supply voltage having a relatively small positive potential, perhaps +5 v. The selected drain 16 (labelled D0 in this example) is allowed to float under these programming conditions so there is little or no current through the source-drain path. The Fowler-Nordheim tunneling across the tunnel oxide 19 (with

thickness of about 100 Å) charges the floating gate 17 of the selected cell 10a, resulting in a shift in threshold voltage of perhaps 3-6 volts after a programming pulse approximately 10 milliseconds in length.

A selected cell 10 is erased by applying a voltage Vee (internally generated) of perhaps -10 v on the selected wordline/control gate 12 and a voltage of about +5 v on the source 15 or bitline 13. The drain 16 (the other bitline 13) is allowed to float. During the erasure tunneling, electrons flow from the floating gate 17 to the source 15 because the control gate 12 is negative with respect to the source 15.

When a "flash erase" is performed (all cells erased at one time), all of the drains 16 in the array are allowed to float, all of the sources 15 are at potential Vdd, and all of the wordlines/control gates 12 are at potential -Vee.

To prevent a write-disturb condition during the programming example (cell 10a being programmed), all of the sources 15 of non-selected cells, such as cell 10b, on the same wordline WL1 of FIG. 3 are held at a voltage Vb1, which is in the approximate range of 5-7 volts positive. The drains 16 of non-selected cells such as 10b are allowed to float, preventing any source-drain currents from flowing. The voltage Vb1 applied to the sources 15 prevents the electric fields across the tunnel oxides 19 of the cells, including example cell 10b, from becoming large enough to charge the floating gates 17.

Another condition to be avoided is the "bitline-stress", or deprogramming, associated with a high electric field across the tunnel oxide of a programmed cell when the source of the cell is at a potential near Vb1. To prevent this bitline stress condition, the non-selected wordlines/control gates WL0 and WL2 of FIG. 3 are held at a voltage in the approximate range of 5-10 volts positive, thereby reducing the electric field across the tunnel oxide 19 of each non-selected programmed cell. A programmed cell such as 10c has a potential of about -2 to -4 volts on its floating gate, so when the voltage Vb1 on the source S1 of such a cell 10c is in the range of 5-7 volts positive, the field across the tunnel oxide 19 could tend to deprogram the cell, but with voltage in the range of 5-10 volts positive on the wordline WL2, the field is reduced. This voltage on the wordline/control gate WL2 is not so great, however, as to cause a voltage threshold V_t change in a cell having no charge on its floating gate.

The cells described above can be read at low voltage. For example, a row of cells may be read by placing +3 v on the selected wordline/control gate, zero volts on all of the other wordlines/control gates, zero volts on all of the sources, and +1.5 v on all of the drains. In this condition, the source-drain path of a cell will be conductive in an erased or a non-programmed state (a cell with zero charge on its floating gate), i.e., storing a logic one. A programmed cell (programmed to the high-voltage-threshold state, with a negative charge on the floating gate) will not conduct, i.e., storing a logic zero.

A method for making the device of FIGS. 1 and 2a-2e will be described in reference to FIGS. 4a-4d. The starting material is a slice of P-type silicon of which the substrate 11 is only a very small portion. The slice is perhaps 6 inches in diameter, while the portion shown in FIG. 1 is only a few microns wide. A number of process steps would be performed to create transistors peripheral to the array, and these will not be discussed here. For example, the memory device may be of the

complementary field-effect type in which N-wells and P-wells are formed in the substrate 11 as part of a prior process to create peripheral transistors. The first step related to the cell array of the invention is applying oxide and silicon nitride coatings 30 and 31 as seen in FIG. 4a, and patterning these coatings using photoresist to leave nitride over what will be the channel regions, the sources and drains, and bitlines 13 while exposing the areas where the thick field oxide 22 is to be formed. A boron implant at about $8 \times 10^{12} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ dosage is performed to create a P+ channel stop region beneath the field oxide 22. Then the field oxide 22 is grown to a thickness of about 9000 Å by exposing to steam at about 900° C. for several hours. The thermal oxide grows beneath the edges of the nitride 31, creating a "bird's beak" 22a instead of a sharp transition.

Turning now to FIG. 4b, the nitride 31 is removed and, in the area where the bitlines 13 are to be formed, an arsenic implant is performed at a dosage of about $6 \times 10^{15} \text{ cm}^{-2}$ at 135 KeV, using photoresist as an implant mask, to create the source/drain regions and bitlines. Next, another thermal oxide 14 is grown on the face to a thickness of about 2500 to 3500 Å over the source/drain regions and bitlines 13, during which time a thermal oxide of about 300 Å will grow over the channel areas (due to the differential oxidation occurring when heavily-doped and lightly-doped silicon are exposed to oxidation at the same time), to create the oxide layers 14 above the source/drain regions and bitlines 13. This oxidation is in steam at about 800° to 900° C. At the transition areas 18 where the bird's beak 22a has been formed, the edge of the originally-formed thermal oxide has masked the arsenic implant so the concentration is lower and so the oxide growth in that area is less than that of the oxide 14 of the oxide 22.

Referring now to FIG. 4c, a window 19 (also seen in FIG. 1) is opened in the gate oxide 20. This is done using photoresist as mask, and etching through the oxide 20 to the bare silicon, then growing a thin oxide to form the tunnel window 19. During oxidation of tunnel window 19, oxide 20 over the channel region will grow to approximately 350 Å.

Referring now to FIG. 2a, first polysilicon layer is now applied to the face of the silicon slice, doped N+, and a coating 34 of oxide, or oxide-nitride-oxide, is applied to separate the two polysilicon levels. The first-level polysilicon is defined using photoresist to leave elongated strips in the Y-direction, parts of which will become the floating gates 17. An oxidation, performed after the first-level polysilicon, and also creates the gate oxide 35 for the series enhancement transistor 36. A second polysilicon layer is deposited, doped N+, and patterned using photoresist to create the wordlines/control gates 12. At the same time as the wordlines/control gates 12 are defined, the edges of the first-level polysilicon are etched, so that the elongated X-direction edges of the floating gates are self-aligned with the edges of the control gates.

A self-aligned ion implant step is performed, using the stacked polysilicon-1 and polysilicon-2 layers of wordlines/control gates 12 and floating gates 17 as a mask, to create the isolating regions 21. For this purpose, boron is implanted at a dosage of about 10^{12} cm^{-2} at about 70 KeV. After annealing and oxidation, this implant produces the P+ regions 21 very much like channel stop implants beneath field oxide.

The physical dimensions of P-type isolating element 21 may be less than the corresponding physical dimen-

sions of LOCOS isolating element 21 of co-pending U.S. patent application No. 07/494,060 referenced above. Therefore, the memory arrays using the cell 10 of this invention may utilize less area on an integrated circuit chip.

Optionally, the junction profile on the channel side of source 15 may be tailored to make certain that it terminates under the 350 Å gate oxide 20, extending over the entire lower surface of window 19 and thereby maximizing the field-plate breakdown voltage of the source junction. Extension 15a or 15b of source 15 extends past the window 19 area and greatly increases the possibility that erasure will be by purely Fowler-Nordheim tunneling and not by hot carriers. For example, extension 15a may be formed to extend source 15 completely under the lower surface of window 19 by implanting a N-type impurity in window 19 prior to or after growing the 100 Å coating. An alternative procedure is to include phosphorus as one of the doping materials used to form source 15, then subjecting the slice to a temperature cycle that causes the phosphorus to diffuse laterally under window 19 to form extension 15b.

While the invention has been described with reference to an illustrative embodiment, this description is not meant to be construed in a limiting sense. Various modifications of the illustrative embodiment, as well as other embodiments of the invention, will be apparent to persons skilled in the art upon reference to this description. It is therefore contemplated that the appended claims will cover any such modifications or embodiments that fall within the true scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. An electrically erasable, electrically programmable memory cell formed at a face of a semi-conductor layer of a first conductivity type, comprising:
 - a source region formed at said face to be of a second conductivity type opposite said first conductivity type;
 - a drain region formed at said face to be of said second conductivity type, said drain region spaced from said source region by a channel area;
 - relatively thick oxide layers differentially grown over said respective source and drain regions;
 - thick insulator regions formed at said face laterally adjacent respective ones of said differentially grown oxide layers, each said thick insulator region on a side of said respective differentially grown oxide layer opposite said channel area, and adapted to laterally isolate said cell from a like, next adjacent cell;
 - a thin insulative tunneling window formed at said face adjacent said source region;
 - said source region, said channel area, said drain region and said thick insulator regions linearly arranged in a row direction, a floating gate overlying said tunneling window and insulatively overlying at least a portion of said channel area, said floating gate extending over said differentially grown oxide layer overlying said source region and completely, in said row direction, an adjacent thick insulator region; and
 - a control gate conductor insulatively overlying said floating gate.
2. The memory cell of claim 1, wherein said tunneling window completely overlies said source region.
3. The memory cell of claim 2, wherein said source region has been extended under the tunneling window.

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4. The memory cell of claim 1, wherein said thick insulator regions comprise silicon oxide.

5. The memory cell of claim 1, wherein said floating gate and said control gate conductor are formed of polycrystalline silicon layers.

6. The memory cell of claim 5, wherein said control gate conductor is part of an elongated wordline extending along said face, and wherein said source and drain regions are respective parts of elongated bitlines extending along said face at an angle to said wordline.

7. An array of electrically erasable and programmable read-only memory cells formed at a face of a semiconductor layer of a first conductivity type, comprising:

a plurality of parallel elongated drain regions formed at said face to be of a second conductivity type opposite said first conductivity type and to be elongated in a column direction, a row direction defined to be at an angle to said column direction;

for each drain region, an elongated source region of said second conductivity type formed in parallel thereto, each source region and an adjacent drain region spaced apart by a channel region, to form memory cells with a cell associated with each channel region;

for each of said source and said drain regions, an overlying relatively thick differentially grown oxide layer;

for each cell, a thin insulative tunneling window formed at said face adjacent said source region;

a plurality of columns of cells each including a source region and a drain region, a plurality of elongated thick insulator regions formed in between respective ones of said columns to isolate said columns from each other in said row direction;

for each cell, a floating gate conductor overlying said thin insulative tunneling window and insulatively

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overlying at least a portion of a respective channel region, said floating gate conductor extending over said differentially grown oxide layer overlying said adjacent source region and completely overlying, in said row direction, a thick insulator region adjacent the last said differentially grown oxide layer; and

a plurality of rows of said cells formed each to be elongated in said row direction, a control gate conductor for each said row insulatively disposed adjacent said floating gate conductors in said row so as to be electrically coupled thereto when preselected voltages are applied between said control gate conductor and said source and drain regions.

8. The array of claim 6, and further comprising, for each cell, an extended source region extended by doping into a respective channel region.

9. The array of claim 8, wherein said thin insulative tunneling windows overlie a portion of said extended source regions.

10. The array of claim 8, wherein said thin insulative tunneling windows completely overlie said extended source regions.

11. The array of claim 7, wherein said relatively thick differentially grown oxide layers overlying said source and said drain regions comprise silicon oxide.

12. The array of claim 8, wherein said thick insulator regions comprise silicon oxide.

13. The array of claim 8, wherein edges parallel to said row direction of said control gate conductors are self-aligned with edges of said floating gate conductors.

14. The array of claim 8, wherein for each cell, said floating gate conductor at least partially overlies, in said row direction, a differentially grown oxide layer of a next adjacent column.

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